

Annotation of Patrick West's "Theoretical Allegory / Allegorical Theory: (Post-)Colonial Spatializations in Janet Frame's *The Carpathians* and Julia Kristeva's *The Old Man and the Wolves*", *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 26 (2008), pp. 73-94.

Daria Tunca, University of Liège

In this dense article, Patrick West focuses on spatiality and its relationship with allegory, theory and fiction in Julia Kristeva's *The Old Man and the Wolves* (1994) and Janet Frame's *The Carpathians* (1988), two novels which contain references to the Eastern European mountain range mentioned in the title of the latter book.

Part of the scholar's argument is that Kristeva's allegorical novel encourages the establishment of one-to-one correspondences between fiction and theory. This tendency most notably manifests itself in the narrative's treatment of space, which is presented as a universalizing – and by extension, argues West, a colonizing – entity. Ultimately, the critic suggests that *The Old Man and the Wolves*, which embodies theoretical concepts in fictional form, can be considered a site of "allegorical theory".

Janet Frame's *The Carpathians*, by contrast, is said to explore the complexities of space and its links with history by foregrounding the dynamism of geography – a fluid approach which, the article points out, Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey has called "tidalectics", in reference to the shifting relationship between land and sea found in island literatures. To support the argument that Frame's novel can be considered "tidalectic", West starts with an analysis of the author's reflections on the idea of the linguistic signifier, and goes on to demonstrate how she reconfigures the notion of allegory by rejecting a strict equivalence between sign and concept, while at the same time retaining mechanisms of correspondence. One of the ways in which Frame recasts traditional understandings of allegory is through her

representation of spatiality as illogical – a reshaping for instance encapsulated in the paradoxical statement that “distance is near” (*The Carpathians*, p. 194). By shunning rigid frameworks, the New Zealand writer effectively engages in a “tidalectic” (and therefore flexible and post-colonial) theorization of allegory. Considering that *The Carpathians* not only features such a renewed form of allegory as a subject matter, but also uses it as a technique, the critic suggests that the novel may be regarded as a “theoretical allegory”.

This sketchy summary merely touches upon some of the intricate issues explored in West's article. Unfortunately, the scholar hardly makes any effort to alleviate this overwhelming complexity; on the contrary, his often cryptic prose may put off more than one reader. This is regrettable, since the essay offers many stimulating insights into both Kristeva's and Frame's works – ideas which, as suggested above, are likely to elude those lacking either patience or a solid theoretical background.